



IRENÆUS c.115 – 200

Over the past 2,000 years countless organizations, governments, monarchies, and empires, have come and gone. But the church from generation to generation, century to century, even millennium to millennium has continued and grown. But it hasn't been easy. There have been times when its very existence has been gravely threatened by enemies without; other times mortal danger has risen from false teaching from within the ranks. The church is only truly the church when it is faithful to the central core of teaching handed down by Jesus and the apostles. Since the beginning some have beguiled the church with heresies and false teachings that undermine the Gospel. What's so interesting is that the same old heresies keep reappearing. Defenders of the faith have always come forth to expose heretical teaching and help the people of the Lord discern truth from error.

Irenaeus was one of the earliest and most notable of those who helped the church stay on course. Born about 115 A.D. in Smyrna (modern Turkey), Irenaeus often heard the aged Polycarp preach. Irenaeus treasured Polycarp's close connection with the apostle John, one who had been an eyewitness of Christ's time here on earth.

When he was about forty or fifty, Polycarp sent Irenaeus to Gaul (now France) as a missionary to spread the gospel of Christ. While there he witnessed the furious persecutions upon Christians there. The 92-year-old bishop of Lyons was martyred and Irenaeus became bishop in his stead. Some say he was killed a few years later in the persecutions; however, this is uncertain, and we don't know exactly how or when Irenaeus died.

Leading the flock of persecuted Christians wasn't the biggest problem for Irenaeus, however, it was the threat from heretics. Many of these heresies were forms of Gnosticism, the belief that people could be saved through a special, secret knowledge. (Forms of Gnosticism are still being peddled today in the New Age Movement.)

Irenaeus analyzed the varieties of Gnostic beliefs in detail and wrote a multi-volume work called *Against Heresies* clearly setting forth the basic doctrines shown in Scripture. In attacking error with Scripture, Irenaeus came to a greater understanding of the truth. He summarized this truth in a writing titled *Rule of Faith* which declared the faith of Christians in all ages.

He taught Christians in the second century, and he teaches us today, to refute those who claim to be an elite group of believers with an inside track on the truth. He taught Christians to measure all teaching by the apostolic truths found in the Scriptures.